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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Mayor Elicker Celebrates Opening of Reentry Welcome Center**

*Center is first in state offering one-stop services to individuals involved with the justice system.*

NEW HAVEN, Conn. – Today, New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker joined City and elected officials, state leaders, and a team of human services professionals serving ex-offenders to celebrate the opening of The Reentry Welcome Center. The newly opened site is a one-stop drop-off and resource center for residents reentering to the community post-incarceration or currently or previously involved in the justice system. At a dedication ceremony outside the Center at 830 Grand Avenue, the Mayor underscored the urgent need for such a program in New Haven. For the past ten years, the City has received about 900 people released from incarceration annually.

“New Haven’s incarceration rate is almost five times higher than the statewide average,” said Mayor Elicker. “Our administration has long recognized the need to provide better opportunities to justice-involved individuals, especially in the days immediately following their release. The City is proud to be a part of a partnership implementing new and creative solutions to address these needs and support the successful transition of affected individuals into the community.” He continued, “With crime on the rise nationally, we need to start addressing it at its root. This one-of-a-kind facility is an example of what we ought to establish in all our major cities: to say that everyone deserves a chance to thrive and a second chance.”

[Project M.O.R.E.](#) is providing the space for The Reentry Welcome Center and will oversee its operation. The nonprofit organization has provided a range of services to the ex-offender community for thirty years. The Center will be the first in Connecticut to serve as a one-stop-shop for all justice-involved residents, including those on pre-trial release, under community supervision on probation or parole, and completing their sentences. Operating costs are to be covered by a combination of public and private funding as part of a broader systemic solution to enhance reentry services coordination, service delivery, and pool resources.

The Project M.O.R.E. Reentry Welcome Center implements an innovative model of service delivery. It will be a one-stop-shop for individuals reentering New Haven from incarceration. These individuals are dropped off at Project M.O.R.E. directly from the Department of Correction upon release. Before arriving at the Welcome Center, staff will connect with the Department of Correction to assess each individual’s service needs. Upon release, they will be connected directly with service providers to address those needs to provide a seamless transition back into the Elm City.

“Supporting returning individuals to reestablish themselves in our communities is not only the right thing to do, but it’s also the smart thing to do,” said Dr. Mehul Dalal, New Haven’s Community Services Administrator for the City of New Haven. “With COVID19 continuing to spread throughout our communities, it is more important than ever that returning residents are connected to the appropriate information and health services. Nobody is safe unless we are all safe.”

The Reentry Welcome Center is an opportunity to increase coordination, communication, and mutually-reinforcing activities among service providers. The numbers make it clear that this integration makes sense from both a humanitarian and cost perspective. Three-quarters of incarcerated people have experienced homelessness before their incarceration. Over 90 percent of people released from incarceration have a substance use history. Chronic medical issues are more prevalent among previously incarcerated individuals. Formerly incarcerated individuals also account for over half of overdose deaths.

New Haven has been at the forefront of reentry services in Connecticut, dating back to Fresh Start, a reentry initiative introduced under Mayor John DeStefano. About half a dozen reentry programs have come into being in the ten years since, funded with either federal grants or local funds. Mass incarceration disproportionately impacts communities of color, as has the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We are taking a broad and comprehensive approach to increase opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals, move towards a social services approach to public safety, and reduce recidivism. We are setting returning residents up for success,” said Carlos Sosa Lombardo, the City of New Haven Director of the Prison Reentry Department.

City leaders hope the initial grant will allow Project M.O.R.E. to leverage resources and sustain The Reentry Welcome Center beyond COVID-19. The group plans to do so in two phases, the first of which will focus on providing services on the day of discharge and ongoing peer support in the community. Over time, the Center is planned to grow into a one-stop hub that centralizes direct services that include, but are not limited to: behavioral health, workforce development, job development, family reunification, court-ordered services, benefits, and housing assistance.

Project stakeholders, partners, and funders joining Mayor Elicker at the dedication included Alder Ellen Cupo; State Senator Martin Looney; Dennis Daniels, President and CEO of Project M.O.R.E.; Morris Moreland, Vice President of Project M.O.R.E.; Keisha Gatison, Director of the Reentry Welcome Center; Assistant New Haven Police Chief Renee Dominguez; Eulalia Garcia, District Administrator, Connecticut Department of Correction; Eric Daigle, the VP of People & Culture at LAZ Parking; and Dr. Benjamin Oldfield, Chief Medical Officer, Fair Haven Community Health Center.

The Center has partnered with LAZ Parking to provide employment opportunities to its clients and the Fair Haven Community Health Center to provide COVID testing, addiction services, and overall health services as needed.

“We are very fortunate to have cultivated relationships with community stakeholders and service providers who are willing to be present at our facility to forge relationships with our clients and provide service as quickly as the same day of release. The Department of Correction is an integral component of this program,” said Keisha S. Gatison, Director of the Project M.O.R.E. Reentry Welcome Center. “This endeavor could not be possible without the tireless efforts of our leadership team, Dennis Daniels and Morris Moreland. We are also eternally grateful to the City of New Haven and the Tow Foundation for all of the support given.”

For more information on the City’s Prison Reentry Department, follow them on [Facebook](#) and visit their landing page on [the City website](#). For more information on Project M.O.R.E., [visit here](#).

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